

Surgeons in Cork who wanted to learn how to carry out laparoscopic cholecystectomy practised on 35 pigs (*Irish Journal of Medical Science* 1991;160:243-5). Having traversed the learning curve, they then went on to successful operations on 70 patients. Here in Britain the law does not allow surgeons to practise on animals, which may have operations only as part of a research study.

*Consultations by telephone with a nurse form an important part of primary care in Sweden; around 20 million such calls are made each year. A Swedish study reported in the "British Journal of General Practice" (1991;41:462-5) found little difference between patients seen in the surgery and those given advice over the phone. Shouldn't British doctors be showing more interest in this approach?*

Some children given computer games become so engrossed that they wet their pants rather than leave the game to go to the toilet (*American Journal of Diseases of Children* 1991;145:1094). Parents may be reassured, however; once the child has been shown how to use the "pause" button the problem disappears.

*A study in the United States of 2921 people who injected illegal drugs found that those who had diabetes had lower (10%) rates of infection with HIV than those without diabetes (24%). The report in the "Journal of the American Medical Association" (1991;266:2259-61) says that patients with diabetes have easier access to sterile injection equipment and are less likely to share it. The results provide further evidence that addicts would have lower rates of HIV infection if they were given sterile needles and syringes.*

The Veterans Administration in the United States has computerised data on all the patients treated in its hospitals. Using these data research workers did an eight year follow up study on 1041 men treated for acromegaly (*Cancer* 1991;68:1673-7). Twenty seven developed cancers of the oesophagus, stomach, and colon, twice the expected figure. The number of cancers of the colon was, indeed, three times that expected, a finding in line with previous clinical studies. These results must cast further doubt on proposals to treat elderly people with growth hormone to increase their muscle mass.

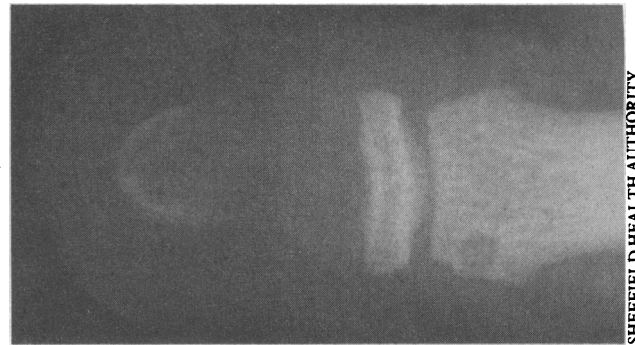
*Many "BMJ" readers post their old copies on to colleagues overseas, but no doubt more would do so if they were given the names of suitable recipients. Minerva has a long list of doctors in eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America who would like to read the "BMJ" but cannot afford it. Anyone wanting an address should write to the "BMJ."*

One hundred and eighty five patients were seen in the emergency department of a hospital in the United States having had resuscitation for cardiac arrest started outside hospital—but without success. Eventually 16 were resuscitated, but none of these patients left hospital alive (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1991;325:1393-8). The authors concluded that if initial resuscitation outside hospital has failed there is no point in making further efforts after the patient has reached hospital.

*Snake charmers and dancers do risk their lives, it seems: the "Quarterly Journal of Medicine" (1991;239:751-62) describes three people who were bitten by king cobras while participating in the snake dance in Rangoon Zoo. All three survived despite the snakes having been "greatly provoked."*

Most manufacturers of intrauterine devices (IUDs) withdrew them from the market in the United States in the 1980s because of fears of litigation, and only 1.5 million American women use this form of

contraception. Family Health International is now calling for these attitudes to be changed: its current quarterly bulletin (*Network* 1991;12(2):1-12) claims that there is virtually no link between IUDs and pelvic inflammatory disease for women not exposed to sexually transmitted diseases.



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*A 16 year old man presented after an accident while servicing an industrial vacuum cleaner. He was testing the suction of the cleaner against his left palm when his left index finger inadvertently entered the machine. On examination the nail of this finger had been avulsed and there was a small wound in the nail bed, but the finger otherwise looked normal. In a plain radiograph the distal phalanx of the finger, apart from the epiphysis, was missing. At surgery a thin shell of bone remained attached to the fibrous septae of the finger pulp. Apart from this the fingertip had been filleted. An excellent functional recovery was made after removal of redundant soft tissue and primary closure of the wound. —DECLAN O'DOHERTY, lecturer in orthopaedic surgery, DAVID FENDER, house officer, department of orthopaedic surgery, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2JF.*

The frequent mouth infections seen in smokers may possibly be linked with the effects of tobacco smoke on bacteria (*Chest* 1991;100:628-30). Smoke inhibits Gram positive cocci much more than Gram negative rods and so encourages an overgrowth of pathogenic bacilli.

*And another damaging effect of smoking on health appears in "Occupational Health and Safety" (November 1991:36-8). Apparently people who complain of recurrent backache associated with driving include a high proportion of smokers. Smoking is said to "reduce nutrition to spinal tissues."*

A colleague of Minerva's recently reflected on how some patients, especially elderly patients, view modern medical technology as omnipotent. A 91 year old woman came to his surgery in a great state of anxiety, having been told that the five year battery in her pacemaker should be replaced with a new 10 year one. She protested that she didn't want to live another 10 years and that five would do nicely. She was relieved to hear that long life batteries didn't make long life compulsory.

*Women from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds in Kentucky are being taught to read and being given education about cancer at the same time. According to the "Journal of the National Cancer Institute" (1991;83:1374-5), women enrolling in literacy classes are given simple reading material about cervical smears, with what is described as "an overwhelming response." More material is now being prepared dealing with other cancers.*